U.S. Spies on Ho Chi Minh Trail

By Jack Anderson

No one is likely to admit it officially, but American Special Forces are now venturing into Laos and even North Vietnam itself to spy upon the Communist infiltration routes.

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The Americans are guerrilla specialists who speak the Vietnamese language and are at home in the jungle. Their chief function is to radio information about enemy movements to command posts, which in turn direct our planes where to strike.

Sometimes jets, already in the air over Vietnam, will hit a target within minutes after the special forces have spotted it.

The chief object of this secret surveillance is the famous Ho Chi Minh trail, which is actually a network of jungle trails running from North Vietnam, through Laos, into South Vietnam. Some trails are footpaths; others are wide enough to handle trucks and tanks.

The American infiltrators have reported everything from elephants to bicycles hauling weapons through the jungle. Thousands of coolies, carrying packs on their backs or balancing bundles on the ends of bamboo poles, move like ants down the trails.

Heavier equipment is dismantled and hauled in parts on bicycles, which have been converted into one-man cargo carriers. Rockets and heavy artillery are lashed to the back of animals or loaded upon trucks. The Vietcong have learned to space their trucks a mile apart, so the planes can never catch a convoy lined up like ducks.

Unreliable Spies

At first, the Central Intelligence Agency hired Laotians and Vietnamese to spy upon the Ho Chi Minh trail. All too often, they took the CIA's money, then disappeared, presumably to spend it. What radio reports were received from inside Laos and North Vietnam weren't always accurate. As a result, the Army and CIA started putting Americans in charge of the reconnaissance teams.

They are most active at night when the infiltration traffic is also heaviest. Vice President Hubert Humphrey has argued inside the policy-councils that the United States should send guerrilla teams into North Vietnam on commando raids, thus giving them a taste of their own Vietcong medicine. Up to now, however, the Special Forces teams are sent into enemy territory to spy; they engage in virtually no sabotage operations.

The Communists are fully aware of their presence.

Alienating Negro Vote

At a time when Adam Clayton Powell and the Rev. Martin Luther King are calling upon Negroes to leave the Democratic Party, Rep. Mike Kirwan, the grizzled and grumpy chairman of the Committee for Re-election of Democratic Congressmen, gave them added reason to defect by excluding them from recognition at the sumptuous fund-raising dinner last week.

Negroes were permitted to buy tickets to the dinner and listen to President Johnson orate. But that was about all. The long list of planners printed on the dinner program didn't contain a single Negro name.

Rep. William Dawson, (D-Ill.), the venerable Negro leader, happens to be vice chairman of the Democratic National Committee and secretary of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. Yet he wasn't so much as consulted about the dinner.

Dawson paid his $250 and took his seat with the Illinois delegation. But he was completely ignored at the dinner. Other Negroes in Congress got the same brush-off.

It was a different story in 1948 when the party was flat broke and needed money for Harry Truman's presidential campaign. Dawson raised hundreds of thousands of dollars among Negroes to keep Mr. Truman in the White House.

Again, in the 1960 presidential election, Dawson delivered enough Negro votes in Chicago to nose out Richard Nixon in Illinois and clinch the victory for John F. Kennedy.

The reason Kirwan squeezed Dawson out of the dinner arrangements, according to insiders, is that Kirwan doesn't like to dilute his power in the Party. The proceeds from these fund-raising affairs are poured each year into his Democratic Campaign Committee to Re-elect Democratic Congressmen. If Kirwan likes them, he gives them generous campaign funds.

Literary Washington

Bill Douglas, the most prolific member of the Supreme Court both in books and opinions, has just written a volume which should bring some nostalgic memories to LBJ. It's called "Farewell to Texas—a Vanishing Wilderness." Bill doesn't say so, but some people think that the Texas wilderness has not entirely vanished, merely been transplanted to Washington . . . Dan Tyler Moore, wartime super spy, has turned out an opus, "Wolves, Widows and Orphans," aimed at protecting widows and orphans from the wolves both on Wall Street and elsewhere. Moore exposes more ways to cheat than some Congressmen ever dreamed of.

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